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MITHRA AND AHREMAN, BINYĀMĪN AND MALAK ṬĀWŪS

TRACES OF AN ANCIENT MYTH IN THE COSMOGONIES OF TWO MODERN SECTS

INTRODUCTION

A comparison between the Zoroastrian Cosmogony and those of other faiths whose origins are to be sought at least partly in the Indo-Iranian religious tradition, demonstrates the unique character of the Zoroastrian version, and suggests a number of doctrinal implications. The Zoroastrian Cosmogony clearly implies that the world was originally created perfect, its present ambivalent state being the result of the Assault of the Evil Spirit, and that after this period of Mixture it should return to an even more complete state of perfection. There is evidence in the Avesta itself, however, to suggest the existence of an older myth, which regarded the present state of the world as the result of a positive act of deliverance. It seems likely that, in the original version of that myth, the 'second stage of creation' (i.e. the dynamic, differentiated world in which we now live), was brought about by a Primeval Sacrifice, performed by Mit(h)ra. Parallels for such a myth are to be found in the Veda. There, however, the creative act is ascribed to Indra, whom Zoroastrianism regards as a wholly evil being.

As far as one can tell from the scanty evidence, Roman Mithraism must have been inspired at least in part by a similar myth, although it also recognises *Deus Arimanius*, a being whose origin must almost certainly be Zoroastrian.

The links between this postulated pre-Zoroastrian myth and the Vedic and Mithraic cosmogonies have been discussed in some detail elsewhere,¹

¹ Notably in "Cosmogony and Cosmology (Zoroastrian)" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*

and it is intended to give only a brief summary of the arguments here. The purpose of the present paper is to show that the essentials of the pre-Zoroastrian cosmogony, with an admixture of Zoroastrian elements similar to that of Mithraism, can still be found in the mythology of two modern sects, the Yezidis and the Ahl-e Haqq, both of which may have originated among speakers of Western Iranian languages. Although we know relatively little about the early history of these sects, they are generally held to have developed at a time when Zoroastrianism had already been reduced to the position of a marginal religion in Iran. The pre-Zoroastrian faith of the Western Iranians is of course widely believed to have disappeared almost without a trace before or during the Achaemenian period, when Zoroastrianism became the dominant religion in these lands.

The evidence of Yezidism and of the religion of the Ahl-e Haqq suggests, however, that such a picture of the history of Iranian religions is too simple. It is not easy, especially in pre-literate societies, to eradicate beliefs which are deeply rooted in popular culture. It will be argued here that knowledge and concepts deriving from an older religion can survive in tribal or isolated milieus although the people in question have converted to a new faith long ago. It would seem that, in such cases, ancient lore can survive side by side with the teachings of the official religion and that, under special circumstances, the two can be combined to form the basis of new religious beliefs.

THE ZOROASTRIAN COSMOGONY

Before embarking on a discussion of other versions of the Cosmogony, it may be useful to recall the details of the Zoroastrian myth of the creation, as set out in the *Greater Bundahišn* (Anklesaria 1956), and in the *Selections of Zādsparam* (Anklesaria 1964).

It is said there that, in the Beginning, Ohrmazd dwelt on high, in pure light. Ahreman was in the depths, in darkness. Ohrmazd was aware of the antagonism of Ahreman. To prepare himself for battle, he first created his Creations in a non-material (*mēnōg*) state, in the form of "bright white fire" (GBd I. 44). The Creations remained in this state for three thousand years. Ahreman created his demonic creations out of darkness. Ahreman then made an attack on the luminous world. Ohrmazd initially offered peace, which Ahreman rejected. Finally, the two Spirits made a PACT²

(forthcoming), and "Mithra and Ahreman in Iranian Cosmogonies", to be published in J.R. Hinnells (ed.), *Studies on Mithraism*, Rome (forthcoming). A more substantial publication on the question is in preparation.

² Some key words referring to concepts which play a significant role in several of the cosmogonies discussed here are here printed in small capitals for easy reference.

(*paymānag*)³, to wage war in a well-defined battlefield, the world, for a limited period of time. The three stages of the ensuing cosmic drama are: 1) Creation (*Bundahišn*), 2) Mixture (*Gumēzišn*), 3) Separation, i.e. of Evil from Good (*Wizārišn*).

1ST STAGE: Creation. The 3000 years of the Creation began when, after making the Pact, Ohrmazd recited the Ahunawar PRAYER. This caused Ahreman to fall back into the darkness, in a stupor which lasted for the entire period of the Creation. During this time Ohrmazd fashioned his creations in material (*gētīg*) form, and celebrated a “spiritual SACRIFICE” together with the other members of the HEPTAD (i.e. the *Ameša Spentas*, GBd III.23). Ohrmazd became the special guardian of man, and each of the other six Creations was placed under the protection of one of the *Ameša Spentas*. First he created the SKY (originally held to be made of STONE⁴), which enclosed the world like the shell of an EGG.⁵ The second creation was that of WATER, which filled the lower half of the ‘egg’. The third creation, EARTH, was shaped like a flat disc, and floated on the primeval waters. On it stood the fourth, fifth and sixth creations: the single PLANT or Tree, the Uniquely-created BULL, and the First MAN, Gayōmard.⁶ In some accounts the seventh creation, pervading the others, is said to be FIRE (GBd I.a.4; III.8); other passages do not mention fire in this connection (GBd I.54; I.a.13). During the 3000 years of the *Bundahišn*, the creations were motionless and light, with the sun standing still in the middle of the sky.

2ND STAGE: Mixture. Ahreman made a renewed attack, which proved successful. He penetrated the Sky, polluted the Waters, made a hole in the Earth, caused the Plant to wither, killed the Bull and the Man, and tainted

³ Note the apparent anomaly of this part of the myth, which represents the only known instance of direct agreement between Ohrmazd and Ahreman. Moreover, in view of Ohrmazd’s omniscience, there can have been no objective need for such an agreement. In view of Mithra’s links with the Pact or Contract, and the description of him as a Mediator (Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, see Griffiths 1970: 46-7), it seems possible that the Zoroastrian version is in fact a reinterpretation of an older version of the Iranian cosmogony, in which it was Mithra who made or guarded a primeval pact. A pact made when the world began plays an important role in both the the Yezidi and the Ahl-e Haqq traditions, and in Mīrdrakvandi’s saga the two opposed Gods make an agreement (see below). It is of course possible these accounts were inspired exclusively by the Judaeo-Christian concept of the Covenant, but in view of the apparently Iranian character of the traditions in question, it seems more likely that they preserve an element of the pre-Zoroastrian Iranian cosmogony (see further below).

⁴ On the links between the sky, stone, crystal and metal see Bailey 1943: 120ff., Boyce 1975: 132-3.

⁵ See Bailey 1943: 135-6; Plutarch *apud* Boyce and Grenet 1991: 458, 459. On similar beliefs in ancient India see Kīrfel 1920: 7.

⁶ Not without difficulty, it seems, Ohrmazd persuaded the *Fravašis* of men to come into the material world (GBd III.23-4; for an AH parallel see below).

Fire with smoke. Initially, it seems, Ahreman was victorious: the world was dark (GBd IV.22; Zadsp II.11,18f; III.1; DD XXXVI.34). Then movement entered the world, and the good creations began to fight back. Night alternated with day. The Waters flowed. MOUNTAINS grew up on the earth, which was 'anchored' by their roots. The first rain divided the original land-mass into seven continents. The dried Plant was pounded and mixed with water, which caused plant-life to develop.⁷ The seed of the Bull became the source of animal life, and the first human couple developed from the semen of Gayōmard.⁸ Fire protected the world of righteousness, and made life and movement possible (Zadsp. III.77f). The total duration of the state of Mixture will be 3000 years.

3RD STAGE: Separation. After a final *yasna* ceremony, performed by Ohrmazd and Srōš (Zadsp XXXV.31f), the Renovation (*Frašegird*) will take place, which marks the beginning of the state of Separation, when the powers of Evil will have been defeated.

In sum, the Pahlavi Books state that the material world was originally created perfect, motionless and light. The second stage of the history of the universe, brought about by the incursion of the Evil Spirit, constitutes a lapse from this ideal state, while the final stage will see it return in an even more perfect manner.

The evidence of the Young Avesta is insufficient to show with certainty how this myth developed. However, it appears to be consistent, for the most part, with the hypothesis that the essential features of the Cosmogony described here go back to an early stage in the history of Zoroastrianism.⁹ The character of Zarathustra's own *Gathas* is such that few firm conclusions can be drawn from these texts alone. However, Y 45.1.d , "The one of Evil doctrine shall not destroy existence a second time¹⁰" (*nōiṭ daibitīm duš sastiš ahūm mərəšiiāt*), suggests that the present state of the world is attributed to the destructive activities of the powers of Evil in the past, which seems to agree with the evidence of the later Zoroastrian tradition.

⁷ More plants, species of corn and medicinal herbs, are said to have sprung from the limbs of the Bull (GBd VI.e.2),

⁸ Gayōmard's body also produced metals (GBd VI.f.8).

⁹ See for details my "Cosmogony and Cosmology (Zoroastrian)".

¹⁰ For this interpretation of Av. *daibitīm* as an adverbial form see Humbach 1959, I:124; II:61. The alternative solution, taking the word as a adjective qualifying *ahūm*, ("the second existence", so e.g. Bartolomae 1904: 754, s.v. *duš.sastay-*; Kellens and Pirart 1988:154), would presumably still imply that A.M. had ruined the world as it is now (cf. also the reference to the two Spirits "at the Beginning" in the following stanza, Y 45.2.)

THE LINKS BETWEEN COSMOGONY AND RITUAL

Several features of the Zoroastrian Cosmogony suggest that a link existed in early Iranian and perhaps Indo-Iranian thought between accounts of the origin of the world, and the sacrificial ritual, the *yasna* (see also Boyce 1970: 26f; 1975: 141). In its older form, the *yasna* consisted of the ritual offering and consumption of sacrificial meat and the juice of the Haoma plant (and of their preparation, which involved killing an ANIMAL and pounding the Haoma PLANT), by HUMAN priests sitting on the EARTH under the open SKY, near a source of WATER and in the presence of FIRE. All seven 'Creations' of the Cosmogony are therefore represented in the ritual (Boyce 1970). The primeval killing of the Bull finds a parallel in the blood-sacrifice (cf. Boyce 1970: 31f), and the pounding of the Plant reminds one of the Haoma ritual, in which dried twigs of the Haoma plant are pounded to extract the juice. Moreover, Ohrmazd's 'spiritual *yasna*' at the beginning of the Creation, and the final *yasna* before the Renovation also suggest such a connection.

Any theory seeking to link the Zoroastrian Cosmogony directly with the *yasna*, however, would need to explain an apparent incongruity: the role of the human sacrificer in the ritual was evidently beneficial, whereas the killing of the Bull and the crushing of the Plant in the Cosmogony are described as evil acts by the wicked Ahreman. According to the Zoroastrian account, it was in fact the incursion of the Evil Spirit which caused the motionless, 'embryonic' stage of the world to give way to the dynamism and diversity of the World of Mixture.

THE PRE-ZOROASTRIAN VARIANT¹¹

The Zoroastrian Cosmogony, however, probably differs radically from the original Indo-Iranian version of the same myth,¹² witness the implications of passages from the Avestan hymn to the *Fravašis* (Yt 13). Although the present version of the hymn is naturally heavily zoroastrianised, parts of the text, as Kellens¹³ has pointed out, appear to contain traces of an earlier cosmogony.

It is said there that the *Fravašis* gave help to the Creator and that, as a result, the waters flow, plants grow, the wind blows, children are born to

¹¹ For a fuller account see, with references, my "Mithra and Ahreman in Iranian Cosmogonies".

¹² It seems likely that this version of the Cosmogony was prominent in Indo-Iranian mythology; however, other myths presumably existed alongside it.

¹³ Kellens 1989: 113: "Les Fravaši prolongent, dans le mazdéisme de l'Avesta récent, un vieux motif indo-iranien: le sacrifice primordial qui permet au démiurge de vivifier l'univers."

man, and the sun, moon and stars move in their appointed courses (vv.14-6). The *Fravašis* also help Ahura Mazdā to “hold asunder” heaven and earth (v.2). It is further stated that, after Creation, plants had long stood still, without growing (*yā para ahmāt hištənta fraðātā; afroaxšaiieñtiš...darəyəmciṭ pairi zruuānəm*, Yt 13.55). In the next verse, the *Fravašis* are praised for delivering them from that state: “but now they cause them to grow..” (*āat tā nūraṃ frauuaxšaiieñti...*). Elsewhere (vv. 77-8), Vohu Manah and Ātar (i.e. Fire) are said to have prevented Angra Mainyu (Ahreman) from attacking the world, “so that he could not stop the waters from flowing, the plants from growing; at once the very strong waters... flowed forth, and the plants grew” (*yaṭ nōiṭ āpō takāiš staiiaṭ, nōiṭ uruuarā uruθmabiiō hakaṭ...fratacin āpō səuuištā uzuxšiiānca uruuarā*). These passages seem to show that, in another and presumably earlier version of the Iranian cosmogony, the waters had in fact originally stood still, a plant or plants had not been able to grow, there was no procreation, heavenly bodies did not progress, and the sky pressed upon the earth (cf. v. 2). The prototypes of the ‘creations’, therefore, were presumably confined in a narrow space; this seems to find confirmation in the legend of the triple extension of the earth at the beginning of time (Vend 2.10f.), which has parallels in the Veda (RV 2.15.2, 7.87.5), and in Plutarch’s statement that Zoroastrians believed that, during the process of creation, Ohrmazd “magnified himself to three times his size” (see Boyce and Grenet 1991: 458). The first stage of creation was evidently regarded as less than ideal, and the world was delivered from it by a positive act.

The older myth thus appears to agree with the Zoroastrian Cosmogony in describing the first stage of creation as an embryonic state in which the prototypes of the creations were motionless, while movement and diversity came to the world at the beginning of the second stage. The main difference between the two accounts lies in their explanation and understanding of this course of events: the Pahlavi Books regard the beginning of the ‘second stage’ as the result of the assault of the Evil Spirit, the older myth saw it as a deliverance.

In such a Cosmogony which regarded the transition from the first to the second stage of the creation as a positive event, the parallelism between the ‘second act of creation’ and the sacrifice would be strong and uncomplicated. If the ancient ritual of the *yasna* thus served as a model for an Indo-Iranian myth of the cosmogony, it is at least arguable that this myth, like its Zoroastrian counterpart, must have involved all the main ‘elements’ of that ritual, i.e. Sky, Earth, Water, Fire, Plant, Animal, and Man—or a divinity whose role mirrors that of the human priest.

It is plausible, therefore, to assume that the older myth postulated an initial stage in which the dark and narrow stone sky, containing within itself both sun and fire (cf. the Indian evidence below), enclosed the motionless waters, the un-extended earth, and the prototypes of plants, animals and men. A primeval sacrifice then followed, which caused the sun to come up¹⁴ in a raised sky, giving light and energy to the extended earth, which enabled the waters to flow and vegetable, animal and human life to grow and multiply. The concepts of gestation and birth may of course have played a role in the development of the myth.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE VEDAS

Although the ancient Indian texts have no coherent account of a primordial sacrifice, many elements of the Vedic cosmogony may derive from such a myth. Before the second stage of the Cosmogony, the world was dark (RV X.129.3); the SUN and the COWS were hidden in STONE (*aśman*, cf. Ir. *as(m)an*- "stone, sky"); the EARTH floated on the WATERS (Kirk 1920: 9), but the waters were also confined. The 'second act of Creation', liberated the Cows and the Waters, and brought forth the Sun (and thus light), FIRE, and SOMA (Ir. *Haoma*; cf. MacDonnell 1917: 43); like the single Plant of the Zoroastrian myth, Soma then generated all plants (MacDonnell 1917: 154). The 'second act of Creation' is most often, though not exclusively, ascribed to Indra, who achieved it through his victory over a demon or serpent.

The prominence of a cult of Indra, however, is widely held to be a relatively late phenomenon (Benveniste and Renou 1934; Thieme 1960: 311f.), perhaps reflecting the ethos and social conditions which obtained at the time of the migrations of the Indian and Iranian tribes. It seems likely, therefore, that Indra's creative functions were largely borrowed from Varuna and Mitra, the lords of Water and Fire (cf. e.g. RV 7.61.4). Mitra in particular appears to have yielded many traits to Indra (Thieme 1960: 311f.) Also, it is Mit(h)ra's original element, Fire, that was believed to cause movement and growth.¹⁵ Furthermore, in the Zoroastrian tradition, Mithra is felt to have special links with the ritual (Boyce 1969: 26-7), and he delivers from 'narrowness' (Yt.10.22-3; Thieme 1957: 46-7). It seems plausible, therefore, to assume that the Primeval Sacrificer of the original myth, the demiurge whose sacrificial act brought about the 'second stage of Creation', was indeed Mit(h)ra.

¹⁴ Note that in Zoroastrianism, the *yasna* is always performed during the first watch of the day, which is under the protection of Mithra. The Iranian tradition may well go back to an Indo-Iranian one.

¹⁵ See Zadsp III.77f.; GBd VI.g.1.

THE ANCIENT MYTH AND MITHRAISM

Mithra, however, is one of the greatest *yazatas* of Zoroastrianism, and is thus unlikely to have inspired the concept of Angra Mainyu. Indar, on the other hand, is regarded by Zoroastrians as one of the chief demons (GBd V.1; XXXIV.27). Since Zarathustra's people probably had renewed contacts with the 'proto-Indoaryans' before the latter conquered the subcontinent (Burrow 1973), it seems possible and indeed likely that this Iranian people encountered a developed Indra-cult among the proto-Indoaryan tribes. If this was so, the Zoroastrian teaching that the 'second stage of Creation' was a fall from grace caused by the actions of the Evil Spirit could be explained as a reaction inspired by the Prophet's aversion to the cult of Indra, and the amoral ethos it presumably represented.

Such an (obviously hypothetical) course of events would explain why neither the Vedas nor the Avesta contains a full and unequivocal account of the original myth: since Indra is primarily a warrior god, and the original priestly sacrifice is replaced in the Veda by his heroic defeat of a demon or serpent, the link between Cosmogony and Sacrifice — and thus the coherence of the myth itself — must have been gradually lost, whilst most of its essential features continued to be remembered, set in a novel context. If, as Y 45.1 suggests, the fundamental elements of the Zoroastrian cosmogony go back to the teachings of the Prophet, Zoroastrianism must implicitly have denied the traditional links between Cosmogony and Sacrifice from its beginnings. This would almost certainly have necessitated a fundamental re-interpretation of the deeper meaning of ritual and its elements. It is not impossible that such speculations may have helped to inspire Zarathustra's teachings about the great Gathic Entities.¹⁶

Ironically, therefore, the clearest evidence that such a myth did indeed exist in antiquity comes from Roman Mithraism, rather than from the Iranian world. In view of the parallels between the ancient myth and such elements as the Tauroctony, the name of the Demiurge, his rock-birth and his links with a Cave¹⁷ in Mithraism, some connection between Mithraism

¹⁶ It is intended to suggest here, as Mary Boyce (1970) has done before, that Zarathustra's ponderings on essential elements of the ritual may have caused him to apprehend powerful moral forces, of which these elements, like the Creations themselves, were exponents. In the Gathas, which probably reflect a stage when the Prophet's insights had developed after he first became aware of the Entities' existence, Zarathustra appears to explore the mutual relations between these. To assume, as Narten (1982) appears to do, that if links existed between Entities and Creations in the mind of the author of the Gathas, it must be possible to detect a "system" there, where Vohu Manah is invariably associated with cattle, etc., seems inappropriate and indeed misleading.

¹⁷ Cf. the Indo-Iranian concept of the stone Sky, from which Mithra must have come into the original, cave-like world.

and Iranian religious beliefs can hardly be denied.¹⁸ Since we have no certainty as to the nature of the channels between the Iranian and Roman cults, or their date, the Roman evidence throws little further light on the history of Iranian religions. It seems unlikely, however, that the origins of Roman Mithraism are to be assigned to the period before Zoroastrianism became the 'official' religion of Western Iran. This implies that there were Iranians who were sufficiently aware of a non-Zoroastrian myth — and may thus have been sufficiently devoted to an non-Zoroastrian cult — to help transmit it to an alien culture, at a time when Zoroastrianism was already dominant in western parts of the country. The fact that Mithraism recognises *Deus Arimanius*, whose origin, as was suggested above, must almost certainly be Zoroastrian, indicates, moreover, that Zoroastrian influences had already affected the beliefs of this cult when the Romans came into contact with it.

THE YEZIDIS AND THE AHL-E HAQQ

The Ahl-e Ḥaqq and the Yezidis are now distinct sects, the former regarding itself as a branch of Shi'ite Islam, while some members of the latter community claim to be Zoroastrians.¹⁹ Both groups consider themselves to be monotheists (see e.g. Sulayman and Jundi 1989), whose reverence for their respective Heptads is no different from that of other religions for their Archangels. The two groups trace their origins back to different historical figures. Šayx 'Ādī b. Musāfir (d.ca.1162 C.E.) is generally regarded as the founder of Yezidism, although he was the author of Sufi works whose Islamic orthodoxy is not disputed (Lescot 1936: 22f); the heretical character of the sect is held to have originated with ~~his oldest son~~, Šayx Ḥasan b. 'Ādī (d.1254/5 C.E., see Lescot, *loc. cit.*; Guest 1987: 15f). The Ahl-e Ḥaqq, whose faith is characterised by a strongly cyclical view of history, believe that the Truth (*Ḥaqīqat*), on which their faith is based, was brought into the world by 'Alī, who revealed all secrets to his companions. 'Alī manifested himself again in the 11th century C.E. as Šāh Xošin, and then again as Solṭān Saḥāk (fl. 14/15th cent. C.E.). The latter has been described as "the real founder of the sect, the reformer who revives the forgotten or neglected ancient laws" (Ivanow 1953: 12, similarly Mokri 1967: 49). The members of the Heptad are most widely known by the names they bore when they were companions to Saḥāk. Indeed, as Ivanow (1953: 13) points out, the AH religion itself can be referred to as

¹⁸ See more fully my "Mithra and Ahreman in Iranian Cosmogonies".

¹⁹ In recent years a group of Yezidis, led by Prince Muawiyyah, has actively sought to be recognised as Zoroastrians, and has founded the *Koma Ezdiya/Zerdeštiya* (Zoroastrian/ Yezidi Society) of Bonn under his auspices.

“the Covenant of Binyāmīn” (*Šarṭ-e Benyāmīn*), Binyāmīn being the name of Jibrā’il during the period²⁰ of Saḥāk.

As far as the teachings of these sects are concerned, an important distinction between them appears to be that the notion — which is central in AH beliefs — that God and the Heptad manifest themselves in human form in every age,²¹ does not appear to play as prominent a role in Yezidism (but cf. Edmonds 1967: 6). Although the names Jibrā’il, Mikā’il, Isrāfil and ‘Azrā’il are known to both sects as the original names of Archangels, the names by which they are best known in the two sects do not correspond, nor do their functions in the respective mythologies.²²

The similarities between the sects, however, are far more striking than their differences. As more material is published there appears to be increasing evidence of the close links between the two.²³ Significant parallels can be found, for instance, in the obligation on members of both sects to be affiliated to two members of ‘priestly’ families²⁴ (an institution reminiscent of the Zoroastrian one of *dastwarīh*),²⁵ and in their cosmogonical myths. Both Cosmogonies state that, before Creation, God dwelt in a PEARL. Inside the Pearl, He first created the ‘Lord of the World’, followed by the rest of the HEPTAD. God made a COVENANT with the Heptad, or its leader,²⁶ and a BULL was sacrificed; then the world was

²⁰ Or “incarnation”, the AH expression being “dress” (*jāme, dūn*).

²¹ For a brilliant description of the different concepts of time in the beliefs of the AH see Mokri 1967: 46f.

²² Note in particular the different identifications of ‘Azrā’il; in Yezidism he is said to be Malak Ṭāwūs, while the AH identify him with Pīr Muṣṭafā (on whom see below).

²³ E.g. the appearance of Bahlūl and Pīr Dāwūd, who are normally associated with AH mythology, in Yezidi material (for Bahlūl see Ritter 1976: 23-29 and Hamzeh’ee 1990: 42f with n.47. For Pīr Dawūd see Sulayman and Jundi 1989: 110f.) Cf. also references to Malak Ṭāwūs in an AH context, e.g. Ivanow 1953: 46, Mokri 1967: 44, and Van Bruinessen, forthcoming art.

²⁴ In Yezidism these are called *Šayx* and *Pīr* (see Edmonds 1976: 7-8, Guest 1987: 35); the AH refer to them as *Pīr* and *Dalīl* (see Xvāje al-Dīn: 51, Van Bruinessen, forthcoming art, and, without reference to the *dalīl*, Ivanow 1953: 4f.) Note that, although the distinction between ‘priestly’ and lay families is strictly maintained, members of the former are not necessarily learned in matters of the faith (see Van Bruinessen, forthcoming art., Edmonds 1967: 7). Most of these families are held to be descended from companions of the founders of the faith, and their prestige no doubt derives largely from their lineage.

²⁵ On which see P. G. Kreyenbroek, “On Spiritual Authority in Zoroastrianism”, paper delivered at the Colloquium “From Jahiliyya to Islam”, Jerusalem, July 1987, to appear in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*.

²⁶ The Covenant or Pact (*šarṭ*) is a central element in the AH myth; for the laconic Yezidi account see MR 33 (below), but cf. also Malak Ṭāwūs’d reference to his “*mīthāq*”, i.e. his Pact with Mankind, in KJ 1.10 (below), which probably mirrors God’s original Pact with Malak Ṭāwūs himself, cf. the popular account given by Edmonds 1967: 4.

created from the Pearl, and entrusted to the care of the Heptad.

The study of these traditions is, of course, not without problems. Members of the sects in question may not reveal information about their religion (Xvāje al-Dīn, Introduction; KJ 4.5, 4.8), and few would in any case be capable of accounting for the archaic elements that can be found there. The task of interpreting the material thus devolves almost entirely on the researcher. The AH and Yezidi traditions, moreover, are essentially oral in character;²⁷ in many cases it is not known for certain when, why and by whom a text has first been written down,²⁸ and minor variations tend to occur in different versions of the same myth. Also, the genius of these sects, especially the Ahl-e Haqq, seems to have lain in their capacity of absorbing and assimilating features of a succession of religious systems without giving up the essentials of their ancient beliefs.²⁹ As a result, elements of apparently non-Iranian origin can occasionally be found interwoven with Iranian material.³⁰ In a paper which is primarily concerned with the latter, such 'alien' elements cannot be discussed in detail. However, the mutual similarities between the postulated pre-Zoroastrian Cosmogony and the Yezidi and AH myths, which cannot possibly be fortuitous, are undoubtedly significant. It seems legitimate, therefore, to suppose that the elements which appear to go back to the ancient myth belong to an older layer of the tradition than the relatively few which seem to have no connection with it.

Comparatively recent AH sources, such as the *Šāhnāme-ye Haqīqat* by the reformist Ḥājī Ne'mato'llah Jayhūnābādī (d.1920 C.E.), contain material that is undoubtedly ancient, and sometimes yield more information than older texts such as the cryptic Gurani *kalām*.³¹ Traditions from diverse

²⁷ For the Yezidi tradition, see Guest 1987: 32-3, and KJ 3.1: "Without a Book I show the way to those I love, and who believe in me".

²⁸ On the controversies concerning the Yezidi Sacred Books see Guest 1987: 141f.

²⁹ See e.g. Ivanow 1953: 30ff, some of whose conclusions, especially those concerning Zoroastrian divinities, now seem somewhat outdated.

³⁰ E.g. the AH story where, after the Pact and the Sacrifice of a Bull, the Creations evolve from the Heptad; the earth is said to come to rest on the horns of a Bull, on whose back stood a lion, and which itself stood on a stone placed on the back of a fish (see Mokri 1966: Persian text p. 57; Hamzeh'ee 1990: 71-2). The Yezidi tradition contains references to "the Bull and the Fish" (*gay-u masī*), which may refer to the same myth (e.g. in *Qewlê Tāwūsī Melek*, Sulaymān and Jundi 1989: 24). In the Yezidi myth, the theme of Adam's expulsion from Paradise because, prompted by Malak Tāwūs, he had eaten forbidden food (MR 18), is clearly borrowed from the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

³¹ Note, however, the similarity between these — sacred metrical utterances, memorised *verbatim*, whose arcane allusions to mythical events can only be properly understood when they are explained by a trained *kalām-xvān* — and the Gathas. The content and structure of the latter are admittedly far more complex, but the AH *kalām* provides a contemporary instance of Iranian sacral poetry which is more or less

sources have therefore been studied regardless of their ostensible period of origin.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE AHL-E ḤAQQ MATERIAL

The Ahl-e Ḥaqq myth of the cosmogony³² states that, before Heaven and Earth existed, God created a PEARL³³ from his own pure LIGHT (Ivanow 1953: 42), and came to dwell in it. The world was then created in two stages (Hamzeh'ee 1990: 70). A CRY was uttered³⁴ and WATER was created;³⁵ God created the *Sāj-e Nār*, the 'Frying Pan of FIRE', which appears to have been placed under the bottom of the Cosmic Ocean (Ivanow 1953: 47-48; fire thus existed originally outside the limits of the world, and then played a crucial role in the act of Creation.³⁶) The *Sāj* heated the water, and HEAVEN was made from its vapour, EARTH from its foam. Then God created Jibrā'il who is also known as Pir Binyāmin. In some accounts it is said that Jibrā'il roamed over the surface of the primeval waters at first without knowing his Creator (Mokri 1966: Persian text 35ff). Subsequently, he was enlightened on this point and God made him Leader of the Creatures (Hamzeh'ee 1990: 262f). Pir Dawūd, the Problem-solver and Guide, was created to act as a witness to the PACT or Covenant between them, and Pir Mūsī as a witness to that, followed by Pir Muṣṭafā. With the female Ra(m)zbār, who rose up out of the water, and two others whose names are variously given, these beings form the *Haftan* or HEPTAD. God concluded a Pact³⁷ with the Heptad³⁸ or with their leader,

deliberately mysterious, and requires elucidation by an initiate. On the *kalām* see Mokri 1967: 4 with n.8, 6-8.

³² One account of the Cosmogony is given by Xvāje al Dīn: 39f.

³³ The Pearl — a small round object which, although it is itself white, appears to contain a variety of hues — is clearly the equivalent of the narrow stone Sky which contained the embryonic creation in the pre-Zoroastrian myth, cf. the cave imagery discussed below. On the Pearl in Iranian folklore see further Mokri 1960.

³⁴ Presumably by God, though this is not absolutely clear from the context, see Xvāje al-Dīn: 39. The equivalent to this Cry in the Zoroastrian myth appears to be the *Ahunawar* prayer. There is some evidence that a loud cry formed part of the Indo-Iranian sacrificial ritual (Kreyenbroek 1985: 164f), and the Cry may therefore have been part of the original myth of the Creation.

³⁵ At the time of the Primeval Sacrifice, God and the four highest Archangels sat on the surface of the water (Ivanow 1953: 43). These links between the original Creator and Water may remind one of those which Varuna has with that element in the Veda (see Lüders 1951).

³⁶ Significantly, the first, primeval ritual sacrifice is said to have been held "in the *nār*" (Ivanow 1953: 48). For an explanation of the *Sāj-e Nār* as a mythical Tree, which may be based on a misinterpretation of the word *sāj*, see Mokri 1966: 17, cf. *ibid.*, Persian Text 253f.

³⁷ The two references to a Pact concluded between God and a member or members of the Heptad presumably go back to a single Pact in an earlier version of the myth. On the

Binyāmīn, to create the world. The ritual sacrifice of a BULL³⁹ was made at the time of the Pact. Then the world was created in its present form: the earth and the sky became steady (Ivanow 1953: 43). Just as, according to the *Bundahišn*, the *Fravašis* at first refused to come into the world (cf. above), in the AH myth the 'yellow clay' that was to form Man was reluctant to assume that shape (Ivanow 1953: 106-107, Xvāje al-Dīn: 40).

It is also said that the seven Heavens were dedicated to the *Haftan*, and the seven earths to their terrestrial counterpart, the *Haftawāne* (Xvāje al-Dīn: 27), the progenitors of the priestly families (*ojāq*⁴⁰). According to some traditions, the latter are the opponents of the spiritual *Haftan*, while others regard the two as complementary (Van Bruinessen, forthcoming). Water, Fire, Earth and Wind are each held to belong to a member of the Heptad (Mokri 1967: 61, n.47).⁴¹

This, then, was the Beginning, which in the sources is immediately followed by the time of Muḥammad, the Period of *Šari'at*. Then comes the Period of *Haqīqat* or Truth, which begins with 'Alī (Xvāje al-Dīn: 27, Ivanow 1953: 8; cf. above).

The Ahl-e Ḥaqq believe that the world will come to an end at some stage in the remote future and there will be a Resurrection, but are more concerned with the fate of the individual soul, the quality of whose next incarnation depends on its behaviour in the previous one. Some deny the existence of Hell, while the concept of Heaven is thought to be a way of alluding to the momentary glimpse of God which the soul may be granted after a great many births (Xvāje al-Dīn: 103-104).

The Heptad is thought to manifest itself on earth in different 'guises' from time to time: different historical figures can be regarded as manifestations of the same being, and are thus essentially identical. Its members appear to bear a close resemblance to divinities of the pre-Islamic world:

Benyāmīn [Jibrā'il]⁴², like Mithra, is associated with the Pact (*Šart*), and

Pact see also above.

³⁸ See e.g. Hamzeh'ee 1990: 163. In Ivanow's account (1953: 43), only five Archangels are mentioned in this context; since the last two members of the Heptad are never prominent, it might be fanciful to suspect Manichaean influence here.

³⁹ Mokri 1966:16, Persian Text p. 54f. Ivanow (1953:102) speaks of the killing and ritual consumption of a "sacrificial animal", which was one of the first creations.

⁴⁰ The term literally means "hearth", presumably referring to the hearth fire of such families.

⁴¹ Fire belongs to Muṣṭafā, Water to Isrāfīl (also called Rafā'il), Earth to Jibrā'il, Wind to Mikā'il. (On these beings see further below.) No exact parallels appear to exist between the details of this list and those of the Zoroastrian system of links between Ameša Spentas and 'Creations'.

⁴² The names in square brackets are those which the Archangels bore at the time of

with the sacrifice of an animal in connection with the ritual (*jam*; Xvāje al-Dīn, p. 88 *et passim*). The original Pact was made first and foremost with him, and he appears to be responsible for the affairs of this world.

Dāwūd [Mikā'il] is the Guide and Problem-solver (Pers. *rahbar*, *moškel-gošāy*), who is also associated with the boar. All this suggests strong links with the Old Iranian Verethraghna.⁴³

Mūsī [Isrāfil, Rafā'il], like OIr. Tiri,⁴⁴ is associated with writing: his characteristic epithet is *qalam-zan*, 'the one who holds a pen' (e.g. Xvāje al-Dīn: 39). As he writes down an account of men's deeds on earth,⁴⁵ however, his concept may also owe something to that of OIr. Rašnu.

Muṣṭafā ['Azrā'il], the 'Collector of Souls' (*qābeḍ-e arwāh*, Xvāje al-Dīn: 39), is the angel of death. He also played a role, however, in the creation of Man from 'yellow clay' (Ivanow 1953: 45, 107, Xvāje al-Dīn: 40). On coming to life, Man is said to have sneezed, which may imply that, in an older version of the myth, Muṣṭafā breathed life into him. It would hardly be fanciful, therefore, to associate Muṣṭafā with OIr. Vayu, "who as lord of the breath of life is also, through its extinction, lord of death" (Boyce 1982: 238). The ambivalence of the community's feelings about Muṣṭafā is illustrated by the fact that, although he is one of the four highest Angels (*cār malak*, cf. Ivanow 1953: 43; Van Bruinessen, forthcoming art.), his name is omitted from most of the prayers and ritual formulas in which other members of the Heptad are mentioned (see Xvāje al-Dīn: 120ff; a notable exception being the formula for washing the dead, *ibid.*, 122-123).

According to Ivanow (1953: 43-44), 'Azrā'il was originally part of the same being as the female angel Razbār, who is associated with water, and also with the last Judgment.⁴⁶ While the former trait may be traced back to the pre-Islamic divinity (Ardvišūra) Anāhita, whose cult was very

the Pact; as was pointed out earlier, they are better known by the names of their incarnations at the time of Sulṭān Šahāk.

⁴³ On Verethraghna's epithet "Problem-solver" see latterly Kreyenbroek in *BSOAS* LIII, 1990, p. 352; on his role as a guide of wayfarers see e.g. Boyce 1977: 70. Verethraghna's links with the boar are attested throughout the Zoroastrian tradition, e.g. Yt 14.15. On this identification cf. Mokri 1974, who also points to a possible connection between Dāwūd and OIr. Vayu. Vayu's most obvious counterpart in AH mythology, however, is Muṣṭafā, who is also known as Muṣṭafā-ye Dāwūdān, "M. (son) of Dāwūd", cf. below.

⁴⁴ See Boyce 1982: 33.

⁴⁵ Being "Lord of the Book", *šāheb-e daftar*, e.g. Xvāje al-Dīn: 124.

⁴⁶ See, e.g. the Prayer for the ritual washing (*ghusl*): *be āb-e Raḍbār, xātūn-e maḥšār*, "By the Water of R., the Lady of the Last Judgment" (Xvāje al-Dīn: 121), and in the last prayer for the dead: *wāseṭe'aš dar rūz-e Rasīxīz Xātūn Raḍbār ast*, "his intercessor on the Day of the Resurrection is R." (*ibid.* 124).

prominent in Western Iran, there appears to be no evidence to link Anāhita with the Last Judgment. Such elements are present — though hardly prominent — in the Zoroastrian concept of Aši,⁴⁷ and Ivanow (1953: 43-44) associates Razbār with both of these divinities. There is only one female Archangel in the AH pantheon, however, and her concept may have absorbed traits from several Iranian and non-Iranian goddesses. While the link with Anāhita seems plausible, further speculation as to the origins of Razbār would therefore hardly seem fruitful.

The most prominent characteristic of the two remaining members of the Heptad — whose names are sometimes given as Ayvat and Rūcyār (Hamzeh'ee 1990: 71), sometimes as Ibrāhīm and Yādgar⁴⁸ — appears to be that they are conceived of as a pair. While the concepts of the other members of the AH Heptad correspond to those of divinities of pre-Zoroastrian origin, the remaining two would seem to find their most obvious counterparts in the Zoroastrian Haurvatāt and Ameretāt.

Another point that should be mentioned in this context is the theme of life and diversity coming out of a CAVE (another equivalent, it seems, of the dark and narrow Stone Sky of the pre-Zoroastrian cosmogony): the clearest instance of this is the myth that God, in his incarnation as Saḥāk, retired with his bride to a cave, where he remained for seven days. After this Binyāmīn brought out the bridegroom, who was accompanied by seven perfect young men, indistinguishable from himself (Ivanow 1953: 126).⁴⁹

THE EVIDENCE OF YEZIDISM

The Yezidi Cosmogony is set out most clearly in the Sacred Books, i.e. the *Meşhef(î) Reş* (MR), and the *Kitēbî Jilwe* (KJ).⁵⁰ The following is a translation of the relevant parts of these texts:

⁴⁷ See Y 43.12 “Sraoša/Hearkening...accompanied by Aši/Reward, who has great richness, who will distribute the rewards to both factions at the time of Benefit” (see Kreyenbroek 1985: 19f, and cf. Y 43.5: “..good reward (*ašim*) unto the good..at the final turning point of Creation”. Aši's links with recompense in the hereafter (though not specifically at the End of Time), are alluded to in GBd XXVI.96: “she protects the treasure of the good, for Heaven is like a jewel-studded house” (*pānagih ī ganj ī wehān kunēd, cē wahišt-iz mām ewēnag ī gōhr-pēšid*).

⁴⁸ Xvāje al-Dīn: 125. For variations see Van Bruinessen, forthcoming art.

⁴⁹ These were the *Haftawāne* (cf. above); note the parallel between Binyāmīn's seven sons and the Zoroastrian Heptad.

⁵⁰ Ed. Bittner 1913. On the history of the texts see Guest 1987: 141ff. For a translation of these and other religious texts, with references to earlier translations, see *ibid.*, 199f. Guest's version, however, contains some inaccuracies. The translations presented here are by the present writer, based on a comparison of the Kurdish and Arabic versions.

Meşhefî Reş:

1) In the beginning God created the White PEARL from his own beloved essence (lit. 'secret'), and he created a White Dove whom He named Enfer, and he placed the Pearl on its back and sat on it for 40 000 years.

2) The first day which He created was Sunday. On it he Created an ANGEL whose name was 'Azrâ'il. And that is Malak Ẓāwūs, who is the greatest of all.⁵¹

3) On Monday He created the Angel Dardā'il, who is Šēx Ḥasan

4) On Tuesday He created the Angel Isrāfil,⁵² who is Šēx Šems.

5) On Wednesday He created the Angel Mikā'il, who is Šēx Abū Bakr.

6) On Thursday He created the Angel Jibrā'il, who is Sajjād al-Dīn.

7) On Friday He created the Angel Šamnā'il, who is Nāšir al-Dīn.

8) On Saturday He created the Angel Ẓūrā'il, who is Faxr al-Dīn.

9) And God made Malak Ẓāwūs the greatest of them.

10) After this he created the form of the seven HEAVENS, and the EARTH and the SUN and the Moon.

11) Faxr al-Dīn⁵³ created MAN and ANIMALS⁵⁴ and birds and beasts⁵⁵ and placed them in the folds of his habit. And together with the angels he came out of the Pearl. And he uttered a tremendous CRY over the Pearl. It came apart into four pieces, and WATER gushed forth from its inside, and became the sea. The world was round and without holes.

12) Then he created Jibrā'il in he form of a bird,⁵⁶ and sent him

⁵¹ In the modern Yezidi tradition, Malak Ẓāwūs is generally believed to have been created on a Wednesday, the holy day of the sect. (I am indebted for this information to Mr. Mamo Othman of Berlin; it was confirmed by other members of the Yezidi community.)

⁵² Texts: *Isrāfā'il*

⁵³ So the text. There can be no doubt that the reference to Faxr al-Dīn here is due to an error, or to sectarian interests. Guest (1987: 202) simply emends to "He created..".

⁵⁴ Kurd.: *heywān rūḥ-le-ber*. Ar.: *al-ḥaywān*

⁵⁵ Kurd. and Ar.: *wuḥūš*

⁵⁶ In the AH myth, it is also Jibrā'il who flutters over the primeval waters in bird-like fashion (cf. above). The AH regard Jibrā'il as the Lord of this world, with whom God made the Pact; in Yezidism, however, that role is attributed to Malak Ẓāwūs (cf. below). According to the MR, Jibrā'il helped God in the act of creation (MR 17, 21; Bittner 1913: 30-3), but it was Malak Ẓāwūs who enabled Man to live in the world and, it

forth and gave the four corners into his hand. After this he created a ship and dwelt on the water for 30 000 years. After that he came and settled in Lalish. He let out a cry in the world and fastened the STONES. The world became earth and began to quiver. Then he commanded Jibrā'il, and it settled down....

28) Before Earth and Heaven God was on the Ocean, he made himself a ship, and he was in the midst of the waters, and circled around.

29) He made the Pearl out of Himself and ruled over it for forty years. After that He kicked it.

30) O wonder! From its tumult and uproar those mountains (were created), and from its dust those hills, and from its smoke that heaven was created; he established it and made it solid and supported it without columns.

31) Then he locked the earth, and took a pen in his hand and began to write down (the names of) all creatures.

32) After that he created SIX DIVINITIES (*xudāy*) from his Essence and His LIGHT; and the creation was as one lights a lamp from another lamp with fire.

33) The First God said to the Second God, "I have created the Sky. Now rise up (in your turn), go to the sky and create something." He rose up and the Sun came into being. And he said (the same thing) to the next; he rose up and the moon came into being; The fourth created the horizon. The fifth created the morning star. The sixth created the atmosphere.

Kitēbī Jilweh:

1.1) I was and am now and will remain until the end. I have power over all created beings. I order their affairs.

1.2) I am present. I am good unto those who believe in me, and who pray to me in times of need.⁵⁷

1.3) No place is empty of me. I am a partner in all the affairs which those who are outside the faith call evil, because they are not according to their desire.

1.10) My wrath is unto those who speak of my Covenant⁵⁸.....

seems, to multiply (MR 18). If it is admitted that all these functions may go back to earlier beliefs about Mithra, these facts could be taken to illustrate the ambiguity with which the second act of creation was regarded in later times. See further below.

⁵⁷ So the Ar. version (*hina 'l-ḥājati*); Kurd.: *demî îş*, "at the time of an affair".

⁵⁸ Ar.: *mūthāq*; Kurd.: *wāde* "promise".

4.1) I do not grant my rights to any of the gods.

4.2) The four elements, and the four seasons and the four columns (*rukṇ*) I have given to further the affairs of the creatures.⁵⁹

4.5) Those who do not divulge my secret, good will reach them.

4.8) O those whose ears hear the Truth from me, do not reveal my name or my attributes to those of the other side, who do not belong to me, that you may not become sinful. You do not know what those who have diverged from the (true) path will do.

Mention should also be made of the ritual slaughter of a bull for the Feast of the Assembly (Edmonds 1967: 16f; Guest 1987: 37). During this feast the Heptad, presided over by Malak Tāwūs, is held to gather annually in solemn conclave, in order to decide the events of the coming year (Edmonds 1967: 4). The festival thus probably mirrors a primeval gathering of the Heptad, at which the sacrifice of a Bull took place.

THE MĪDRAKVANDĪ MATERIAL

Further light is thrown on these matters by a somewhat unexpected source. In the 1940s a simple, self-taught villager from Luristan, 'Alī Mīdrakvandī, attached himself to British and American military circles in Tehran in order to improve his English. His special mentor was Mr J.F.B. Hemming, now of Falmouth, Cornwall. After correcting a series of letters and short compositions, Mr Hemming suggested that Mīdrakvandī might write a longer story. Thus prompted, Mīdrakvandī began to write down what was to become a saga of ca. 600,000 words, entitled *Irradiant*. Mīdrakvandī claimed that he had been told the story of *Irradiant* by his grandfather, who had brought him up and whom he described as "wild". The manuscript, in Mīdrakvandī's quaint English, was eventually studied by the late Professor R.C. Zaehner. In a series of articles (1965, 1967, and forthcoming), Zaehner pointed to the unmistakable structural likeness between the latter part (Book II) of Mīdrakvandī's work and the Zoroastrian Cosmogony. The matter appears to have aroused some interest among Iranists in the 1960s, but as no scholars other than Zaehner had seen the work, and nothing was known as to its whereabouts, it was later shelved as a fascinating but insoluble mystery.

Recently, however, the present writer learned that the Mīdrakvandī papers, including the manuscript of *Irradiant*, were still in the possession of Mr Hemming, who has kindly allowed him to study the documents afresh.

⁵⁹ So Kurd.: *bo iṣ hēnan(-*ī) xelq*. Ar.: *li-ajli qarūrāti 'l-maxlūqīn*, "because of the needs of the creatures."

In *Irradiant*, the opposition between 'Heavenly God' and 'Lionish God' results in a first attack by the latter, which is repulsed; this is followed by an 'Agreement' between the two powers to wage war until either is destroyed. During his next attack, Lionish God hears a triple pronouncement by Heavenly God, and is again defeated. This defeat is only temporary, however, and the rest of the book describes the long-drawn battle between the two opposing forces until the boy Irradiant, Heavenly God's earthly champion, finally triumphs, and marries the daughter of Lionish God.

In spite of his opposition to Heavenly God, Lionish God — who claims to be the creator of the world, and its ruler, but who is not the original Creator of all — cannot be called wholly evil; he has done much to enable man to survive in the world. Although he has close links with the Devil — who is said to be his brother — he is not identical to him.

CONCLUSION

This brief account of *Irradiant* may serve to show the principal similarities and distinctions between this Luri saga, and the cosmogonies of the AH and the Yezidis: they share the concept of a 'Lord of this world', who has creative functions,⁶⁰ but is not the original Creator, and who cannot be called evil although he cannot match God's perfection. The story of Irradiant, however, seems more 'Zoroastrian' in character than the Yezidi and Ahl-e Ḥaqq myths: there is a strong element of opposition between supernatural forces, and a Final Battle between them, features which do not appear to have any particular prominence in the other myths.

For all its similarities to the Zoroastrian myth of the Creation, *Irradiant* is not, in its present form, a Cosmogony: the world already exists when the struggle between the two Gods begins. If, as seems likely, Lionish God was responsible for a 'second stage' in the creation of the world, *Irradiant* could be said to occupy an intermediate position between the Zoroastrian Cosmogony, which regards the assault of Ahreman as the event which brought about the World of Mixture, and that of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq, which does not represent its demiurge, Binyāmin, as being in any way evil.

The Yezidi cosmogony shows the most explicit signs of perplexity on this point (cf. also above, n.53): it is stated in KJ 1.3 that it is wrong to regard Malak Ṭawūs as evil, but the Peacock Angel is nevertheless associated with the Devil of other faiths. The links between Devil and Peacock date back to the pre-Islamic past,⁶¹ so that the association cannot be

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⁶⁰ Or plays an important role during the Creation, as in the case of Malak Ṭawūs, cf. above, n. 56.

⁶¹ Witness the account the creation of the Peacock by Ahreman, which Eznik of

put down simply to late Muslim taunts. The combined evidence of Yazidism and of Roman Mithraism (with its recognition of *Deus Arimanius* as well as Mithras), therefore suggests that a cult or cults existed at some stage in pre-Islamic Iran which, while continuing to regard Mithra's primeval sacrifice as beneficial, also took some account of the implications of the existence and functions of Ahreman. Some of the beliefs of such a cult evidently lived on in the Kurdish mountains long after the coming of Islam.

Zoroastrianism developed in Eastern Iran long before it became prominent in western parts of the country, where a pre-Zoroastrian form of the Iranian religion must have continued to flourish for centuries. When Zoroastrianism came to replace the older faith as the dominant religion of Western Iran (presumably in the Achaemenian period, see Boyce 1982, *passim*), the status of Mithra must have caused some bewilderment. Mithra was a great divinity in both religions, but while the one acclaimed him as the god whose bull-sacrifice brought about the welcome second stage of creation, the other held that this was the deplorable result of Ahreman's murder of the Uniquely-created Bull. At the popular level at least, confusion must therefore have been rife as regards beliefs about Mithra's character, his creative functions, and his relations with Ahreman.⁶² It seems plausible, therefore, to assume that the mythologies of Roman Mithraism, of the Ahl-e Haqq and of the Yazidis — and also, perhaps, the story of *Irradiant* — reflect the various permutations of the original myth which developed under the influence of such perplexities.

Irradiant, however, does not appear to express the beliefs of a known sect, and is more likely to represent the *cultural* heritage of Mirdrakvandi's people than its religion.⁶³ It may therefore represent tangible evidence of the 'substratum of ancient lore' which has so often been invoked to explain the origins of the Yazidi and Ahl-e Haqq sects: the intellectual and cultural heritage of a group or tribe, which is transmitted down the centuries. While such lore does not necessarily have the status of 'religious' knowledge (and consequently does not challenge the official religion of the time), it is so deeply rooted in the culture that, under some conditions, efforts to integrate its truth with that of the official religion can lead to the development of new

Kolb attributes to a pre-Islamic Iranian sect (in Zaehner 1955: 438).

⁶² It is not impossible that the conspicuous development of the concept of the Zoroastrian Sraoša, whose status as 'Lord of this World', capable of dealing with evil, is stressed in the Pahlavi Books, which also accord him a more prominent position in the pantheon than he appears to have occupied in the Avesta (Kreyenbroek 1985:108f, 164f, *et passim*), may have been influenced by popular Western Iranian ideas concerning the demiurge.

⁶³ The arguments for this view have been set out in detail *apud* Zaehner, forthcoming art.

systems of religious beliefs. Mirdrakvandī's long saga therefore helps to explain how the essential elements of an ancient, Indo-Iranian myth could survive among the modern sects of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq and the Yezidis.

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